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## EC69-459 Vinyls and Simulated Leathers

Gerda Petersen

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# VINYLS AND SIMULATED LEATHERS

By Gerda Petersen  
Extension Clothing Specialist

Vinyls and simulated leathers have many uses. Waterproof raincoats and rain hats can be made from these fabrics. Vinyl and simulated leather A-line skirts and matching vests are very attractive. Accessories made of these fabrics can add spice to an outfit.

## VINYLS

There are three basic types of vinyls:

1. *Transparent vinyl*: A clear and colorless film without backing. This cannot be ironed. It can be cleaned by sponging with a damp cloth.
2. *Opaque vinyl*: A thin film of printed or colored vinyl laminated to a backing of soft flexible knit, usually cotton. The outer surface may have a satin or matte finish.
3. *Vinyl coated*: A clear film coating a woven fabric, generally a plain weave, print or solid color in cotton or nylon. Fabrics of other weaves and fibers also may be coated.

Be sure to read the label attached to these vinyl fabrics and follow instructions. Some are dry-cleanable—others are not. Some are washable—others are meant to be sponged off with a cloth. Wrong procedure in method of pressing and cleaning may mean the ruination of your garment.

## SIMULATED LEATHERS

Simulated leather is a fabric manufactured to give the appearance and feel of real leather.

Some simulated leathers are vinyl coated fabrics similar to those described above. By means of printing or embossing, vinyl coated fabric can be made to resemble such skins as alligator, lizard and pigskin.

Another type of simulated leather is a woven fabric, usually of cotton canvas, that is treated with a resin or polyurethane coating. It is light to medium weight. It is washable and dry cleanable and may be pressed on the wrong side with a press cloth.

A third type of simulated leather is a nylon knit with a heat embossed surface which gives the appearance of a soft sleek kidskin. This type of leather-look fabric can be washed and can be pressed lightly. It has a soft supple feel and can be used with any pattern suitable for knits. Often seen in gloves.

## TIPS ON SEWING THE VINYL SIMULATED LEATHERS

### Pattern Selection

Simple designs with a minimum of seams and darts are best. Raglan and kimono sleeves are easier to handle. It is possible to set in sleeves if the fabric has a knit back and is rather pliable. Don't expect it to mold or shape easily.

### Interfacings and Linings

Interfacing is recommended for knit-backed fabrics in the buttonhole and neckline areas to prevent stretching.

If a "leather-look" fabric is used in combination with another fabric, the two should be compatible. That is: combine a washable with a washable, or, a dry-cleanable with another dry-cleanable.

Linings are used in coats or jackets to improve wearing comfort and appearance. Linings might be of taffeta or cotton satin. Lining fabric should require the same type of care as the outer fabric. If outer fabric is washable the lining should also be washable.

### Preparation of Fabric

Keep fabric rolled until ready to use to prevent creasing. Do not fold. Vinyl surfaces will stick to each other. Make any alterations needed in the paper pattern. It may be best to make a test garment of muslin to avoid ripping seams because stitching lines will show. To get a more even cutting line trim off pattern margins. Hold pattern pieces in place with weights or masking tape. If using pins, be sure to pin in the seam allowance to avoid pin holes in the garment.

Mark pattern symbols on the wrong side using a tailor's chalk. Dressmakers' carbon paper may be used if the tracing wheel has a smooth edge. A blunt pencil might be used instead of a tracing wheel.

### Preparation for Sewing

Each leather-like fabric varies slightly in the way it is handled when stitched. Experiment with sewing techniques before sewing the garment.



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Stitch a test seam by using two strips of fabric about 4" by 8". Try heavy duty mercerized thread or a cotton thread with a polyester core. Use a machine needle size 14 for medium weight and 16 for heavier weights. Special wedge-shaped needles for sewing with leather might also be used. For hand sewing try a 7 or 8 size needle. Try a stitch length that is medium to long (8 to 12 stitches per inch).

Tissue paper may be needed to keep the fabric from sticking to presser foot.

Use a lighter pressure and loosen the tension of the machine. Stitch at a steady even pace.

### Darts

Avoid short wide darts. Longer darts can be tapered to a fine point. When stitching, make the last 3 or 4 stitches right on the edge of the fold. Do not back-stitch on point of dart. The dart may be cut open and finger pressed flat. Pounding the open dart with a clapper (pounding block used in tailoring) on the wrong side helps to flatten the dart.

Epoxy glue (Sobo) may be used to hold dart open; or the edges of the dart might be catch-stitched to the knit fabric. Experiment on a scrap of fabric.

Darts may also be top-stitched.

### Seams

Don't pin or baste seams. Use masking tape or paper clips to hold seam edges in place for stitching.

1. *Plain seams*: These may be finger-pressed open. They may be kept from rolling by either gluing or catch-stitching to knit backing.

2. *Double top-stitched*: Finger press seam open and top-stitch on both sides of seam line.

3. *Welt*: Stitch a plain seam. Trim one seam allowance close to stitching line and finger press the other over it. Use masking tape to hold it in place. Top-stitch about 1/4 inch from seam line.

4. *False Felled*: Top-stitch the welt seam then add another row of top stitching close to the seam line. On clear vinyls, seam allowance may be cut away after top stitching.

### Facings and Collars

Facings may be made of the same fabric and treated in the usual way. Understitch facings to keep them from rolling to the front. To eliminate bulk use a lining fabric for facings. It may be necessary to top-stitch edges of collars to keep them flat. To avoid bulk, round corners of collars, cuffs and front openings.

### Zippers

Zippers may be inserted using the slot method.

1. *Hand sewn*—Close opening with hand-basting using the finest needle vinyl will take. Stitch by hand, using buttonhole twist or heavy duty mercerized thread. Take stitches not less than 1/16 inch and not more than 1/8 inch apart.

2. *Machine stitched*—Fold back seam allowance along the seam line and hold in place with masking tape. Bring

seam edges together and hold in place with masking tape on the right side. Turn to the wrong side again and center the zipper face down over the seam. Hold it in place with masking tape. Top-stitch along the seam line. If the seam has not been topstitched, establish the topstitching for the zipper area alone.

### Buttons and Buttonholes

To give buttons extra reinforcement, sew a small flat button on the facing side under each top button. Attach both buttons at the same time.

There are several methods for making buttonholes in vinyls. Make a test buttonhole first. Mark the unextended buttonhole line on the right side. Use masking tape to mark the end lines, and extend position lines over tape.

1. *Slot type*—Mark the length of buttonhole. Stitch a rectangle through fabric and facing 1/8" from this line. Another rectangle might be stitched about 1/8" larger making a double stitching around the buttonhole. Then slash through the mark that indicates buttonhole line.

2. *Hand-worked*—Stitches shouldn't be too close together.

3. *Machine-made*—May be used if care is taken to use a large zigzag stitch. Close or small stitches cut the vinyl. A light-weight interfacing may be needed to keep the knit backed vinyl from stretching.

4. *Bound*—Use any favorite method. The back of the bound buttonhole can be finished by stitching around the buttonhole rectangle, stitching on the right side of garment and through the facing. On facing side, trim the vinyl within the rectangle. The bound buttonhole can also be finished by making a patch buttonhole on facing side using a lining fabric.

### Hems

When turning up hems and measuring for length, secure the edge in place with masking tape.

1. The hem can be glued with epoxy glue (Sobo).

2. Top-stitch near the fold. Make one or more parallel rows of stitching. Trim away extra fabric. This method is good for A-line and gored skirts especially if other top stitching is used on seams, etc.

3. Vinyl with a knit back can be finished with a tailor's hem. Machine stitch 1/4" from raw edge of hem. Slip stitch by inserting needle in underside of hem on stitching line and then picking up one or two threads in the backing. Stitches should not be pulled too tightly.

### Pressing

Finger press or press with a warm (synthetic setting) dry iron and press cloth. Test first on a scrap of fabric. Some vinyls **cannot** be pressed at all. Avoid steam as it may remove simulated leather finish.

### CAUTION

Be sure to read care instructions. Some imitation leathers cannot be dry cleaned, others cannot be washed.